



Winged Elm

By **KIM GILLILAND**, Editor

THE winged elm (*Ulmus alata* Michx.) is a small to medium-sized tree common over most of Alabama except the southernmost counties. The tree gets its common name from the “wings” that grow on either side of the branches. These broad, corky projections usually develop on branches late in the first or second growing year. As a result, the tree is sometimes referred to as “cork elm.”

The range of winged elm extends from southern Virginia, south to central Florida, west to central Texas and north to Central Missouri. This species is occasionally found in wet areas but is more frequently found on drier upland or sandy soils. It is not a major component of any forest cover type in the United States. Winged elm often invades forest openings and old fields, and it is difficult to kill with herbicides.

The leaves of this elm are simple, alternate and doubly serrat-



ed along the edges, about 1 1/2 to 2 1/2 inches long. They are dark green and smooth above and paler green with soft hairs beneath, turning yellow in autumn. The fruit of this tree is a reddish or greenish samara, hairy around the edges, that ripens in April. The seeds are eaten by a variety of birds and small animals.

Like other elms, this tree is susceptible to the fungus *Ceratocystis ulmi*, which causes Dutch elm disease, and to an organism that causes elm phloem necrosis. Both are transmitted by insects and have spread to Southeastern states from the north.

The small branches from the winged elm are used in decorative floral arrangements and other arts and craft displays. Wood from elms is primarily used for furniture, hardwood dimension and flooring, boxing and crates. The wood is heavy, hard, and resists splitting, making it a perfect choice for the manufacture of hockey sticks. During the 18th and 19th centuries, rope for fastening covers of cotton bales was made from the fibrous inner bark of the winged elm.

References

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